

# Changes necessary for English program

Scandal has yet again been spotted in Parlin Hall. The Department of English repeatedly finds itself under close scrutiny by both sides of the political spectrum — leading one to wonder why a department so passionately fought for by all receives such decrepit funding.

The most recently debated item was — hold on to your seats — a memo regarding the grades of English 306 provisional students.

The memo, written to E306 instructors by Professor Wayne Lesser, stated: "The overwhelming number of first essays are receiving grades ranging from C to F, with a majority of those below C. If more than a handful of your papers appear to be significantly better than those we've seen ... please bring a few by to me so we can make sure you're part of our conversation." The Left and Right reactions to "Memogate" are predictably extreme.

The Left translates the memo as a symptom of the University's new initiative to cut admission numbers.

Unfortunately, our University is run like a business, and it makes seemingly good business sense to trim the provisional students first — after we've taken their money, of course.

Provisional students are immediately dismissed when receiving any grade below a C. This fact coupled with the memo's statement, "If more than a handful of your papers appear to be significantly better than those we've seen [below C] ... please bring a few by to me ..." proves the Left is far from paranoid fantasy.

The reaction of the Right, however, leans more toward the realm of actual paranoia. They hold the reason Lesser requests to review the essays of the provisional students stems from his desire to instill politically correct grading standards upon the instructors.

Dean King claims the whole thing to be a big misunderstanding, and he's probably right. One thing this new scandal digs up — other than old conflicts within the Department of English — is the need to examine the possibility of a separate department for rhetoric and composition.

The creation of a department of rhetoric and composition was initially proposed by the Bean Committee, a group designed to improve undergraduate education. Reactions to such a split, as expected, have a broad range.

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department for rhetoric and composition as if it were a novel or foreign concept. In actuality, rhetoric was one of the original seven liberal arts and is a separate department in many prestigious schools. This is not to mention that the University in the not-so-distant past had a Ph.D. program in rhetoric that was considered No. 2 in the country.

UT President Bill Cunningham endorsed the idea and assigned Dean King and Gerhard Fonken to look into it. Dean King has publicly announced that he's in favor of creating the department.

No thinking individual actually trusts Cunningham or King and this makes for immediate opposition to a separate department. Kruppa and other English faculty have come out against it, possibly out of fear of Dean King gaining more power in their department. All of these elements combined create a mess on top of a bloody war within the Department of English which has already claimed several professors.

Ideally, a separate department of rhetoric and composition would create peace in Parlin by parting conflicting interests rather than pitting them against each other. The division would put proper focus on writing, something largely ignored compared to the focus on literature. Furthermore, the plan would expand the range of writing classes and create a standard with which other departments' writing components would be compelled to compete.

The worst-case scenario if a rhetoric and composition department is created would be for Dean King and others to use it to suck the funds from the Department of English they despise and put the department's funds into rhetoric classes made to order by them.

To counter these possibilities before they arise, specific balances should be drawn up and someone dedicated to the goal of objectivity should be named to head the department.

Or we could not have the new department of rhetoric and composition and just let things continue in the Department of English the way they've been for the past several years. But who wants that?